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ABSTRACT

This collection of four papers focuses on the Lancaster and Sussex Projects (England) that place an emphasis on writing outside of school and outside of work by "ordinary" people in their everyday lives. The papers refer to each other; the first is an introduction for the others. "Introduction: Making Writing Visible on the Outside" (David Bloome) describes the Lancaster Project, which seeks to learn what writing is being done in families and communities by ordinary people and the Sussex Project, which asks ordinary people to write about what they observed and thought and then send it to the Mass Observation Archive, a "people's ethnography and historical record" of life in Britain. "Literacy in the Community: A Case Study from Lancaster, England" (David Barton) presents the story of one man and his everyday uses of reading and writing and how they change. "Writing for...Questions of Representation/Representativess, Authorship, and Audience" (Dorothy Sheridan) explores some aspects of the social relationships within which writing for the archive being created by the Sussex Project takes place. "Literacy Practices and the Mass Observation Project: The Place of Writing in People's Lives" (Brian Street) describes the methodology of the project and addresses some substantive issues that have emerged, such as theories of literacy and the relationship between literacy and orality. (YLB)

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ORDINARY PEOPLE WRITING:

THE LANCASTER AND SUSSEX WRITING RESEARCH PROJECTS

David Barton, David Bloome, Dorothy Sheridan, and Brian Street

Spring 1993

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The Lancaster and Sussex Writing Research Projects

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David Barton, David Bloome, Dorothy Sheridan, Brian Street

Section 1 : Introduction: Making Writing Visible on the Outside
David Bloome, University of Massachusetts at Amherst

Section 2 : Literacy in the Community : a case study from
Lancaster, England
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Section 4 : Literacy Practices and the Mass-Observation Project :
the place of writing in people's lives
Brian Street, University of Sussex/Pennsylvania

The papers included here were presented at the Ethnography in Education Research Forum at the University of Pennsylvania, and at the Literacy Speaker Series, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, in February 1993. David Bloome was a Visiting Fulbright Scholar at the University of Sussex. Brian Street and Dorothy Sheridan conducted their research with the help of an Economic and Social Research Council one year grant. David Barton's research was funded by the ESRC over a three year period.

Quotations from the Mass-Observation material are reproduced with the permission of the Trustees of the Mass-Observation Archive, at the University of Sussex. The quotations are taken from replies to the Mass-Observation Spring Directive 1991 on Education, the Uses of Reading and Writing and a Literacy Diary, and from the interviews conducted by David Bloome and Brian Street. Mass-Observation correspondents are referred to by number (in brackets after quotations) to safeguard their privacy.

Whatever errors and problems may be found in this text are the sole responsibility of the authors.

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Section 1

Introduction: Making Writing Visible on the Outside

David Bloome, University of Massachusetts at Amherst

The Lancaster and Sussex Projects: Studying Writing in Everyday Life

There is a great deal of writing going on in everyday life, writing outside of school, work, and "established" publishing. Yet, very little is known about the scope, nature, use, and social contexts of writing in everyday life; indeed a good case can be made that writing in everyday life is nearly invisible. Little attention is paid to writing in everyday life, it is frequently not even considered to be writing, and the people who produce such writing are not usually considered writers.

The Lancaster and Sussex Projects are beginning to give the field of writing and literacy research some ideas about the scope and importance of writing in everyday life. The Lancaster Project, officially known as the "Literacy in Community Research Project," is located at Lancaster University. The Lancaster Project seeks to learn what writing is being done in families and communities by "ordinary" people in their everyday lives. This includes both essayist writing and environmental writing as well as less well-known genres of writing.

The focus on "ordinary" people is an important part of the Lancaster Project (as well as the Sussex Project), although admittedly it is hard to define what an "ordinary" person is. In brief, an "ordinary" person is one who has not achieved fame and wealth, is not part of the "ruling" class, someone not likely to be noted in history textbooks. Perhaps most important for the purposes of the Lancaster and Sussex Projects, an "ordinary" person is someone who does not have privileged access to having their writing attended to by the general public or a recognized mainstream public forum for their writing (as is the case with newspaper reporters, famous novelists, the rich, and the royalty). Although it may be difficult to define what an "ordinary" person is, as Sheridan points out in Section 3, people do differentiate between "ordinary" people and others who they variously describe as "kings and queens," "the posh," "the powerful," "those who don't have to struggle in their daily lives," among other descriptions.

While writing in everyday life includes items such as shopping lists, letters, and notes, there are also kinds of writing in everyday life that are particular to a specific place. One example from the Lancaster Project involves banners hung on the fence around a specific roundabout (traffic circle) in Lancaster. Local people put up bulletin board type announcements about car boot sales (tag sales), birthday wishes, sport team cheers, political messages, etc. As people in the Lancaster Project point out, the thing to ask about this roundabout writing is not the form of writing *per se*, but rather about forms and functions within the social ecology of people's everyday lives. A second example from the Lancaster Project comes from Padmore (1992), one of the Lancaster Project researchers. In her in-depth description of one woman's everyday writing activities, Padmore describes the woman's careful selection and use of greeting cards. Padmore argues that the woman's greeting card activity should be defined as an act of writing. There are important issues in Padmore's argument that emerge when the selection of a greeting card is compared with other activities that are typically viewed as writing activities. For example, compare greeting card selection to how some administrators write letters and memoranda. Many administrators have a book of pre-formatted and generic letters and memoranda. If they need to write a letter, for example, a letter firing an employee, they look in the Table of Contents for letters for firing an employee, select the generic firing letter that most closely matches the situation, put in the details, and sign their name. Or compare the woman's careful greeting card selection and use with the new computerized diagnostic case study report formats in schools. Educational specialists and psychologists need only add testing data and some biographical information about the client to procuce a computerized report form. They choose from a pre-selected list of conclusions and recommendations, press the print button, and a report is produced. It is important to ask whether greeting card selection and use is any less definable as writing than how some administrators produce letters and memoranda and how some educational specialists produce clinical reports. It is important to ask whether the latter two examples are usually considered writing because of who the people are - powerful professionals - while greeting card selection is not usually seen as writing because it is done by "ordinary" people? Whether one agrees or not is less important than that Padmore in her case study description of a woman's greeting card activity and the Lancaster Project have broadened the debate over how writing is defined, and who gets privileged by various definitions of writing.

The Sussex Project is officially known as "Literacy Practices and the Mass-Observation Project" and is located at the University of Sussex. The Mass Observation Archive started in the 1930s as a people's ethnography of life in Britain. Ordinary people were asked to write about what they observed, what they thought, and then send it in, creating what can be called a "people's ethnography and historical record" of life in Britain. "Ordinary" people learn about the Mass Observation Archive Project through newspaper articles and other sources and volunteer to respond to directives (open ended questionnaires and writing prompts). The topics on which they have been asked to write cover a broad range including international and national events, daily life, personal habits and thoughts, observations, among others. Since its

beginning the Mass Observation Archive Project has gone through changes, stops and re-starts, and so forth. The most recent activities of the Mass Observation Archive have been continuous since 1981. Regardless of its stops and re-starts, the Mass Observation Archive can be viewed as a long-term effort to have "ordinary" people write about the lives of "ordinary" people.

Researchers from many different disciplines use the Mass Observation Archive including historians, sociologists, anthropologists, educational researchers, among others. In addition, the mass media occasionally consults the Mass Observation Archive in preparation for a documentary, for background information, or for examples that might be used in their television, radio, or journalistic productions. Students in a broad range of courses at The University of Sussex also use the archive in their studies.

The fact that the data in the Mass Observation Archive is written data has largely gone unacknowledged. That is, the Mass Observation Archive can be viewed as a large scale writing project in addition to being a "people's ethnography" and a historical and social record. One of the purposes of the Sussex Project is to better understand what kind of writing the writing for Mass Observation is. Is the writing ethnography? autobiography? propaganda? When and how do people do their writing for the Mass Observation Archive? Answers to questions such as these are especially important for researchers using the Archive. When a researcher sits in the Archive and reads something written by someone, perhaps written a decade or more ago, it is important to ask what is the nature of the data the researcher is examining?

A second major question investigated by the Sussex Project is how writing for the Mass Observation Archive fits in with the lives of the "ordinary" people who write for the Archive. Is it important to them? Does writing for the Mass Observation Archive make changes in their lives? In brief, what is the social context of writing for the Mass Observation Archive?

In order to study writing in everyday life among the Mass Observation correspondents, the Sussex Project sent a directive on literacy practices and education to the approximately 700 Mass Observation correspondents. Over 400 people responded. Follow-up in-depth interviews are being conducted with Mass Observation correspondents in England, Scotland, and Wales. Findings from the directives and from the interviews are reported in Section 3 and 4 by Sheridan and Street, respectively.

At one level, the questions asked by the Sussex Project focus on epistemological questions - what is the nature of the knowledge contained in the Mass Observation Archive? But the purpose of the Sussex Project is broader. The Sussex Project is concerned with the nature and role of writing and literacy practices in general in the lives of the Mass Observation correspondents, not just with their writing for the Archive but with all of their writing activities. The phenomenon of the Mass

Observation Archive itself - that "ordinary" people enthusiastically volunteer to write for the Archive, and that they feel it is important to do so - suggests that there is a breadth and depth of writing in the general public, among "ordinary" people, that has not yet been revealed or understood by scholarship on writing and literacy. Similar suggestions have been made by historians of writing, such as Howard (1991) and Graff (1979) with regard to breadth (how many people write and the broad range of uses and genres of writing); but as yet there has been little investigation of the depth of writing (the importance people place on writing and the ways they use it to organize, structure, and give meaning to their lives, as well as to make changes in their own lives and in their communities and society in general). In brief, the Sussex Project is an ethnography of writing among the Mass Observation Archive correspondents with specific attention to depth of writing activity.

Considered together, the Lancaster and Sussex Projects provide an alternative to the dominant studies of literacy in communities because both studies eschew a deficit model. Dominant studies of literacy in Britain and the United States have been based the premise that there is an literacy problem, that too many "ordinary" people are illiterate, and that this has dire consequences for the economy, for children who are raised in such families and communities, and for the people themselves. Such studies assume a single, often unproblematic definition of literacy, what Street (1984) has called an autonomous model of literacy, by which all people are judged. By contrast, both the Lancaster Project and the Sussex Project assume that "ordinary" people are literate, and the projects seek to understand what that literacy is, how it is used, what its forms and natures are, how it fits into and is a part of people's lives.

Making Writing "Visible"

Writing is often invisible, as language usually is. It is taken as the carrier of a message or performer of a function, and it is the message or function in which we are interested, not the writing. When writing becomes visible it is often because someone has written badly, used nonstandard spelling or nonstandard grammatical constructions. People spend a lot of time and money attending to their writing and worrying about their writing and other people's writing. They take or are forced to take courses on writing, buy books on grammar and spelling. On the front page of the national newspaper, the *Guardian*, in the lower right corner, there regularly appears a large advertisement for learning to write that offers a free 32-page booklet. That booklet is filled with reasons about why their home-study course on learning to write better should be taken, the advantages of the program, the expertise of the tutors, and how much of a good deal the tuition price of only 217 pounds is. The text of the brochure revolves around a central theme - learn to write more effectively and you'll succeed in business. Especially noteworthy are the pictures in the booklet: Blemish-free white men in suits and ties, smiling but looking earnest, shaking hands (as if making a business deal) or on other pictures, semi-circled around a document or report, with the same disposition. In almost all of the pictures, one of the men is younger, positioned as the person making the presentation and being welcomed and valued by the other men. In most of

the pictures, in the background or to the side was a white women, shorter than the men, dressed in women's office suits, medium heels (postured somewhat off -balance or at an angle), long-ish hair, smiling broadly and either listening to the men or handing them a set of papers. To potential men clients, the not too hidden message is that if you learn to write, you too can be white, accepted by the white business establishment, make money, and you also get someone like one of the women in the background to serve you and listen to you. To potential women clients, I suppose the not too hidden message is that you get to be one of the women in the background, you get to serve white businessmen in suits and listen to what they say.

There are other dominant tropes about writing in our society: There is the trope of the naturally gifted writer as poet or novelist, reclusive, Hemingway-esque or Dickinson-esque, among others. These tropes are gendered tropes.

But such tropes of writing, including the "rewards" promised in the advertisement and elswhere assume a kind of invisibility. It is only by reflecting on the tropes of writing and hidden assumptions about what writing is and can provide that writing is revealed as more than a neutral technology for communicating information from author to reader over time and space. Writing is not a single or homogeneous activity, but involves a great variety of a social practices, ways of organizing relationships with others, of representing experience - in brief, of acting on and in the world - that varies within and across communities. It is the social practices of writing that are invisible.

Part of what the Lancaster and Sussex Projects do is make visible the social practices of writing of "ordinary" people, to understand and appreciate its nature and its role in everyday life, to provide alternative views of writing than those offered in the advertisement in the *Guardian*, in school, or in other dominant tropes of writing (see also Brodkey, 1987; Street & Street, 1991).

Writing On The "Outside"

In both the Lancaster and Sussex Projects, an emphasis is placed on writing *outside* of school and *outside* of work. These worlds of writing and writers are important to understand not only because they inform our theories of writing but also because they inform our theories about education, work, family, and community.

Willett and Bloome (1992) argue that one of the problems with the dominant theories of language and literacy in education is that they are school-centered. They argue, first, that education is wrongly equated with schooling. School is only one site of education. Following Spindler and Spindler's (1987, p. 3) definition of education as a "calculated intervention in the learning process", education can be viewed as occurring in many settings: family, community, work settings, among others including schools. When education is viewed as occurring in many different sites and as inclusive as much more than the formal curriculum, one of the questions to ask about education is what its nature is within and across sites. Another question is what is the relationship of

education in one site is to education in another site? Answers to such questions will be complex and diverse, involving all the kinds of contradictions and dynamics which are inherent in the relationships of social institutions and people to each other.

The second argument that Willett and Bloome make is that writing, like education, is predominantly viewed from a "school-centered" perspective. Educators and teachers are quite naturally concerned about students learning to write in school. They worry about how well students are learning to write, whether the kinds of writing they are learning to do in school are the right genres of writing to teach, and they worry about how activities outside of school might help students write better in school. While these are appropriate questions for teachers to ask, they also reveal a "school-centered" model of writing that defines all other writing and all experiences in terms of learning to write (and read) in school. In its extreme form, family literacy activities (like bedtime story reading) are viewed and valued only for what they contribute to school writing (and reading) achievement. In even more extreme forms, learning to write and be literate is defined as only occurring at school with other forms of learning and literate activity being debased. In opposition to a "school-centered" model of learning and writing, Willett and Bloome propose a "community-centered" model, in which school is viewed as only one site of writing and education within the community. Willett and Bloome do not define community as homogeneous or as equivalent to neighborhood, but rather as consisting of many different social institutions, social agendas, and groups of people, that often conflict and contest with each other. Further, Willett and Bloome argue that it is not the case that the contradictions and conflicts within which people live get neatly resolved. Rather, people live within the tensions of unresolved and perhaps unresolvable tensions that contextualize education, including learning to write.

In addition to meaning outside of school and work, the phrase "On the Outside" also refers to the stance of at least some of the people / writers who have been part of the Lancaster and Sussex Projects. It is difficult to determine how many people participating in the Lancaster and Sussex Projects are "On the Outside," people whose views or ways of life have been marginalized by the dominant society. Whether a person is or is not "On the Outside" depends on how being "On the Outside" is defined. Yet, a good claim can be made that most "ordinary" people can be viewed as having been marginalized, put "on the outside." In some cases, "ordinary" people have created alternative avenues of writing. For example, the QueenSpark writers in Brighton is a group of "ordinary" people - most of whom are of working-class background - who have created their own books and publishing, writing about the lives and histories of "ordinary" people and working-class people and neighborhoods. They are writers both "on the Outside" and literally in the outside as they sell their books at street stalls /flea markets in Brighton on Saturday mornings.

Many of the people interviewed by the Sussex Project articulate a notion of being "On the Outside," as not having themselves as "ordinary" people represented in the dominant voices of history, the mass media, or established publishing.. For some,

writing for the Mass Observation Project is a way to contest being positioned on the outside, since inherently the Mass Observation Project contests dominant histories that omit the voices and lives of "ordinary" people. Others create avenues of writing within communities and family. For example, one woman interviewed by the Sussex Project, in addition to her writing for the Mass Observation, wrote enormously long letters to friends on a daily basis. Indeed her living room was set up for writing letters. There was a special chair and nearby was a table with all her writing supplies. Yet, to look at the living room one would not realize that it was really her "writing workshop." The chair in which she sat and her husband's chair were angled half-towards each other and half-towards the TV. During the day and in the evenings when she would write, her husband would often also be present, although he did little writing. It is not just that she wrote long letters but that she also got the people with whom she corresponded - almost all of them women - to also write long and detailed letters, and these letters maintained a network of friends and family over great distance and time. The scene metaphorically represents many of the issues of being "on the outside." On the surface, one might not realize that much was going on and one might even characterize the scene as representing stereotypic traditional gender roles and relationships as well as stereotypes of working-class people, "ordinary" people, as passive dupes of the mass media. Yet underneath a great deal of writing and contesting was going on. Through the letter writing, the woman was contesting the alienation and separation of family and friendships that modern society and economic repression has promoted, and she was also getting others to do the same. She was creating a world of writing - although when asked she did not consider herself a "writer."

Being "On the Outside" is not just an issue of women writing nor is it just an issue of working-class people writing - these are just two examples. There are other ways in which people are "On the Outside" and who use writing as a way to counteract the vulnerability and invisibility of being "On the Outside." It is a common goal of both the Lancaster and Sussex Projects to reveal the various ways in which people are located "On the Outside" and how they use writing from the outside.

Final Comments

The Lancaster and Sussex Projects have important implications for understanding writing and for understanding learning to write. The Lancaster and Sussex Projects shift the focus away from school-centered views of writing toward community-centered views, remove the invisibility of the social practices that count as writing, and focus attention on the writing of "ordinary" people in their everyday lives. The Lancaster and Sussex Projects show that the dominant and assumed tropes of writing do not describe the broad range of writing practices in society, and that there is a great deal of writing going on in society. Yet, at the same time, the Lancaster and Sussex Projects make clear that "ordinary" people are often writing from the "outside." There is a great deal of importance of the findings of the Lancaster and Sussex Projects for education (not just in school but across educational sites). The passage from Miller's book (1990). *Seductions: Studies in reading and culture.*

captures some of the educational issues involved in the theoretics coming out of the Lancaster and Sussex Projects.

"Young people usually know, from their knowledge of their own families and communities, that there are quite serious discrepancies between how the adults they know use written language and the claims made for literacy by schools and employers. The values of literacy are not anyway, and have never been, equivalent to its usefulness or its relevance.

Indeed, children have never just learned how to read and write and then looked round for uses to which they might put these skills. As they learn to do these things they are also learning to engage with the culture and with specific and specialized practices in that culture. They are also learning about being children in this culture, and especially children who may be black, girls, working-class, poor. Literacy does not in itself deliver any kind of liberation from these conditions, any more than reading literature provides either escape from social problems or solutions to them. 'And by and large young people see through, and reject claims for literacy which exceed their experiences of who goes in for reading and writing, and why.

So, far from advocating either some sort of enriched literacy as an answer to social inequalities, or a sanctioned liberality of readings [and writings], which leaves meaning and pleasure and value to individual readers [and writers] spinning in eccentric isolation, I want the constraints , the differences, the social relations of reading [and writing] and of the production of texts to become curriculum, so that reading [and writing are] seen as engagement and as continuous with - as well as at odds with - the social practices and alliances of people's lives." (pp.158-159).

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Section 2

Literacy in the Community: a case study from Lancaster, England

David Barton, Lancaster University

This paper is based on a transcription of the oral presentation.

Lancaster England and Lancaster Pennsylvania seem quite different cities. In a brief visit to Lancaster Pennsylvania in February it seemed colder but drier. Both cities are about the same size. Lancaster England is a Roman city with a castle on the River Lune. It is quite a hilly city in the north west of England. Most of it consists of rows of Victorian terraced houses built of stone. It was a mill town but the mills collapsed in the sixties. It is a white working-class city with high unemployment.

There is a small Gujerati-speaking moslem community and a small Polish-speaking catholic community. It is also a university town with one of the main employers being the university.

Turning to literacy, figure one is a picture of literacy in Lancaster England. It is of one of the signs hung at the roundabout referred to by David Bloome. The first point to make about literacy is that it's situated. Practices are particular to a particular place. This practice of putting up signs exists in Lancaster England; It did not appear to exist in Lancaster, Pennsylvania (which has no roundabouts anyway!). It doesn't exist in many other towns and cities of England. It doesn't exist within London, a much larger city. It doesn't exist in very small towns. We have found one or two other places where it happens but it doesn't happen in many. So literacy is situated in particular places.

For the past four years we have been studying literacy in Lancaster assuming that what we're studying is something particular to a place. We have collected a wide range of data listed in figure 2. This has included interviewing people, observing people and collecting documents, recordings, photographs. Our activities have included going back to people a year after interviewing them with transcripts of what they had said about literacy, asking for their comments. We have also taken back the themes which we have written about people, asking for their reactions.

Here I will just concentrate on one person we studied, Harry. He is a retired fireman in his late sixties. He is widowed and lives in one of those small terraced houses by himself. The first eleven lines of the attached tanscript are Harry describing himself. We came across him by knocking on his door. So he was not contacted via a College, he didn't volunteer. We knocked on the door randomly. We asked him a few things

about local literacy. How he found out local information? Whether he read the local paper? Whether he bought things through the small ads. that were in the store at the end of the road? If he had problems with reading and writing who he'd get to help him? If he knew people in the neighbourhood who had problems with reading and writing? Whether he ever helped them

Following this short door-to-door survey he agreed to continue working with us. He was one of several people over several months. We went back and we interviewed him about everything we could think about to do with reading and writing. Did he have any books? Where did he get them from? What did he do with them? Did he hide them under the bed? Did he ever throw books away? Did he ever write in books? Did he ever tear them up? Did he write in other people's books? Things to do with books, things to do with notes. Did he keep scrap paper such as old envelopes? Like many people, did he keep them in a little drawer near the telephone? We asked him all sorts of things. Everything we could think about to do with reading and writing over several interviews. And then we pursued in specific directions. So my colleague Sarah Padmore went to the library with him, followed him round the library and saw what he did. Saw how he found out things. Saw that he never used any of the indexes to get information but he could always find the books he wanted.

As an example of his literacy practices, every Tuesday Harry meets with his friend Ted in the morning over a cup of tea. They sit for a couple of hours talking about the local newspaper, The Lancaster Guardian. They read it through. They look for details of their friends in it and they discuss local politics. They also frequently write letters to the editor. They write in to the Lancaster Guardian about local issues. And it's a very particular practice. They do a lot of talking together. Although they can both read and write, and it is a letter that they work on together Ted always does the writing. They always send in letters to the paper signed "Yours disgusted" or "A poll tax payer" . Those letters are really written by people and now when I read the Lancaster Guardian I see the letters and I can always recognise them. They're very particular.

The second point about literacy is that it's particular to individual people. It is important to stress that although I have chosen out an anecdote I like about Harry, I haven't chosen some exotic data. I haven't chosen a special person. Rather for every person we've talked to we can pull out something very specific about their literacy practices which actually surprises us or is new or is different. There isn't one way of reading and writing. People have very particular practices.

To give a clearer impression of Harry, figure 3 is a picture of him, along with some of our themes. When we took back what we had written about him to him to see what he thought about it, we grouped it under a set of themes. These themes come from different places. One of them, the one highlighted, Networks of Support, came from what others in the field of adult literacy, particularly Hannah Fingeret, have written about the importance of networks of support in adults' literacy lives. That was a theme that we started with and we found it very vividly in Harry. That he had people who

helped him with certain aspects of reading and writing, there were people that he helped with certain aspects of reading and writing. And he was very much part of a web of networks in his neighbourhood. It involved all sorts of communication, all sorts of activities, literacy was in there. Networks of Support became quite an important theme with many of the people we studied.

Going to the top of figure 3, what we found was that while we wanted to find out about reading and writing, unfortunately, the people we talked to always wanted to talk about something else. Each person it seemed had a "ruling passion". Something they wanted to talk about. And at first we said "No, no. Don't talk about that. Tell us about where you keep books. Tell us if you use the library." When we stopped pushing and started listening we found that when they told us their story they ended up telling us much more about literacy. And with Harry his ruling passion was the second world war. He had been in the Navy and in many ways, forty-odd years on, his life still revolved around the war. The books he read, the books he took out of the library were all to do with the second world war. That was the only thing that he read. He only read books about the war, going to the library every two weeks and borrowing two or three books and reading them. He is very particular: Not novels, They've got to be "real" ones, and not ones by Admirals but, a phrase we've had already, ones by "ordinary" people.

His ruling passion was the war. When we listened to him talking about this we found a lot out about literacy. He claimed that when he left school he couldn't read and write. He learnt to read and write in the Navy. And it's quite common to find out all the things that people learn after they've left school. Listening to Harry talking about the wa has enabled us to pursue other ideas about literacy with several people such as the importance of the learning people do as adults in their everyday lives and at work. Another theme, and this is not a theme we started with, rather it is a theme that came from Harry, it came from our looking at the data, is the idea of educated/uneducated. These are particular words that Harry used a lot. And he seemed to have a dimension. People are educated or uneducated. Talking of himself he says "Oh I'm uneducated". But his son who went to College "He's educated". And often he'll have differences between himself and his son to do with educated and uneducated. It was a very important dimension to him. (See lines 29-32 of the transcript).

After being in the Navy he was in the Fire service for around twenty years, most of his mature life was in the Fire service. Educated people were those people who could pass exams and pass up through the Fire service by getting exams. He felt they're educated, they can pass exams. He didn't particularly think they were necessarily good Firemen. Good Firemen were people who had the practical skills associated with doing the job, and often they were uneducated. So he had a division going through his work life of educated/uneducated. "Those people who can pass exams I don't necessarily have that much respect for them". And this division came up all over the place. For example, Lancaster being aniversity town, his relationship to the University

was to do with "Oh those educated people but... " There was always sort of "but... " There are things they can't do.
Another theme that came up from him was Truth and Imagination. This idea of "real" books. He would only read real books. This did not include fiction. He had to keep to reality. In many ways he couldn't let himself go. He couldn't imagine things. And this came through in a lot of attitudes to literacy.

The last theme is different literacies. The idea of different literacies is not a new idea any more. They were very apparent in Harry's life. There were the literacies associated with going to the library, using the library. Literacies associated with reading the newspaper and writing a letter to the newspaper. As another example, he once had to write a reference. Just once. He'd been a Fireman and as a Senior Fireman when had retired, a younger Fireman asked him to write a reference. For him this was a totally different literacy. He didn't actually know how to do it. This is described by Harry in lines 41-58 of the transcript. Note the phrase of "getting down to nitty gritty..." That's a phrase he had used elsewhere, that he could write generally, but he couldn't get down to the nitty gritty. The other themes link in here. That's what educated people do. So he didn't know this literacy. He didn't know the literacy of writing references and the idea of Networks also comes in here. It was his son who helped him. And he didn't really mind that his son should help him.

Another example of different literacies which always comes in is when he was in the Fire service he regularly had to inspect hotels and buildings for compliance with fire regulations and then write reports on it. Again this is a different literacy, not something he'd ever learnt in school. He'd never had a lesson in school on writing reports for the Fire service. And for many people it would be of no use. The way people learn those sort of things is on the job. He didn't know how to write a report on fire regulations in boarding houses and hotels. What did he do? He looked up old reports. He looked at the words and phrases and he actually copied the words and phrases out exactly into his reports. And I think this is a common way that people learn new literacies and make them their own. I imagine every Fireman goes through this, he didn't know how to do it. He couldn't admit it. He had to secretly look back, copy out phrases and that's how he gets them. This is described in his words in lines 62-70 of the transcript.

To summarise how we're dealing with Harry. We're looking at particular themes and hope that looking at people's everyday uses of reading and writing is beginning to tell us a different story. It is telling us different things about literacy.

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FIGURE 1. LANCASTER, ENGLAND

FIGURE 2. DATA IN LANCASTER PROJECT

Literacy in the Community project: 3 year project, an ethnographic study of the role of literacy in the everyday lives of people in Lancaster, England, consisting of:

- 20 interviews of adults with literacy problems (Series B interviews);

- 30 interviews of access points for literacy - bookshops; libraries; advice centres, etc. (Series D interviews);

- Detailed study of a neighbourhood, including:
  door-to-door survey of 60 people;
  case-studies of 14 households (Series E interviews);
  other observations; documents; records;

- Collaborative ethnography data: 1 year follow-on project. Using interview transcripts from the earlier project, we returned to ten people to get their reactions, using:
  - Short transcript of interview - ***Their Words.***
  - Write-up of themes from their interviews - ***Our Words.***
  - Pen-sketch.

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(b) HARRY & HIS PARTNER'S PURSUIT OF SEPARATE INTERESTS
(c) HOUSEHOLD MOVEMENT
(d) CHILDREN & EDUCATION - DIFFERENT PATHS TO SAME CAREERS.
(e) CHILDHOOD & LITERACY
HARRY
EDUCATED & UNEDUCATED
TRUTH & IMAGINATION
NETWORKS OF SUPPORT
DIFFERENT LITERACIES

FIGURE 3.

HARRY'S THEMES

TRANSCRIPT

Harry: Pensketch.

I'm 66... How would I describe myself... I don't know really. I like to be liked and so I do everything to encourage people to like me. I help people and do things like that. My personality is I can't be serious about anything. Happy-go-lucky me. I can't be serious. Like to look on happy side of everything.

I always do anything on an impulse me. It just comes in my mind and I do it irrespective of what the cost entails. That's me. I don't hold any grudges against anybody. The thing I enjoy doing most is being in company... men's company. I like men's company for the talk and I'm always out of place when there's women about....

How would you describe yourself: I'd be lost in a crowd of three. Nondescript.

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From interviews:

There was a photograph of a ship mate of mine mentioned in The Soldier. And so I wrote to it in July asking if they could put me in touch with him. And I put in a stamped addressed envelope. I never heard anything. And so I've been sat here thinking I could write to the Normandy Veterans Association in Guildford. And so I've been trying to draft a letter for long enough. And when I write it and look at it after, I think "What a heap of tripe". It's just a matter of once getting in touch. Then it'd flow you see. This is about the fifth draft and I'll no doubt throw this one away and I'll think of summat different. But....

... I know what I want to say but then it's putting it in the proper English. My education was nil actually. I did pass the exam for the Grammar School when I was 10 years old but as my mother said "I can't afford to buy you the cap, never mind the uniform and books", so the opportunity was missed, I must have had the potential though. And I know I can put things into sentences and start new paragraphs in the proper places. But it's the ramblings in between instead of getting down to the nitty gritty. Somebody that was educated would probably say in two sentences what it would take me two pages.

Nobody around here would ever ask you for help with anything to do with a form or anything like that?

Oh aye. I have been asked. People come across "Will you make me tax form out for me." And they've fetched all the papers and I've managed the tax forms for them, you know. Things like that.

On reflection I think this was because I was an officer in the Fire Brigade - people must have thought I was an academic, but I got my rank with hard work in studying for the exams, the last and hardest one was when I was 52 years old. Well I must be. And I must look the part. I've had people come round for what-do-you-call-its... to get a job. References. I've had people come round for references. And I gave them a reference. I gave one lad a reference. He was a fireman and he wanted a job. And he came round to me 'cos I used to be his Officer and asked me for a reference. And I give him one you see. And my lad came round... I always take a copy. And my lad come round, who's very well educated and he started laughing at it. I said "What's to do?" He said "That's no good." He said "You don't do things like that." And he wrote a proper one out you see. So that I got in my car right away and I took it round to this fellow and I said "Give us that one back and have this."

It was rambling you see. Instead of getting down to nitty gritty. Oh no. I didn't feel bad about it? No. Because what did they expect of me anyway. Well I said... I wrote down what I felt about him and it was all true. So what more do they want. And yet

my lad laughed at it. Well, I read his and he actually said as much in a few words you see. That's what annoyed me. I wish I could do that.

Do you get any pleasure in writing?

It's a struggle. Mm. I can write. I mean I'm not illiterate. But I think it's a... something you've got to be trained at really. I always remember my fire service training. When I was doing the hotels and boarding houses. We had to do these fire precautions. Had to go round all the hotels and boarding houses from here to Barrow and issue a paper to them telling them what requirements were needed you see. I knew what they wanted but it was putting it into these words. So I went through all the old files and got... and I made a play on words. I put my words into their... my requirements into their words you see. Until I got it off where I could do it from memory. You know, like I could just do it parrot fashion and....But it was a struggle.

Section 3

Writing for.....
Questions of representation/representativeness, authorship and audience

Dorothy Sheridan, University of Sussex

In the introductory section, David Bloome describes the Mass-Observation Archive as a "people's ethnography and historical record" of contemporary British life. He points to the value of the Archive not only for the richness of its content, but because of what it can tell us about the practice of writing. This section explores some aspects of the social relationships within which writing for the Archive takes place. Unlike the Lancaster project, which is based in a geographic community, the Mass-Observation Archive writers live all over the British Isles and, while there certainly seems to be a sense of community (the community of the Mass-Observation writers), it is meaningful only at a more abstract level. The writers do not know each other personally, and their attachments to other communities co-exist with their identity as "mass-observer", informing and shaping the substance of their texts. This sense of community is reminiscent of Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" although in his case, the focus is on reading (Anderson 1983).

Why should people take part in this particular writing project? They first of all have to hear about it. Then they have to find something about it which makes them think they might enjoy taking part. To date, (and mainly because there has never been adequate funding for direct recruitment), information about the project has nearly always been mediated through articles in the press, and through radio and television programmes. A local paper in the north of England used the headline: "Everyday stories of British folk" (Sheffield Star, 18 Nov 1986); from a local paper in the south:"Bringing history to life" (Brighton Argus, 7 May 1986) and "REAL public opinion" (Argus, 14 Oct 1986). In a centre page spread from a major Sunday paper: "Ordinary People: hundreds of people all over Britain are revealing their innermost feelings - as well as their everyday concerns - in a unique survey of the British way of life. The results should be of tantalising interest to future historians" (Sunday Times, 15 Aug 1982). The language of the publicity frames the enterprise, but it does not explain why it should have attracted as many as 2,500 people since 1981, nor does it account for the dedication which those people bring to their sustained involvement. Nor does it explain in which ways writing for Mass-Observation is congruent (or not) with those people's existing literacy practices. The press references to "ordinary", "everyday", "real history", recur constantly within the writing itself suggesting that they are themes which relate to people's own experiences and aspirations and are important in

understanding what attracts people to write and what kind of audience or reader they write for. "Writing for?" therefore became a central question in our current research.

The question can be understood two ways. "Writing for" as in writing on behalf of - whose life is being represented? And "Writing for" as in writing for a reader - who is it intended for, who is the imagined reader/audience?

The first way of thinking about the question addresses the issue of representation and of representativeness. A common criticism levelled at the Mass-Observation project is one about "representativeness". Since the writers are self-selected, and not a random sample of the British population, the argument runs, their accumulated writings are of limited value for any kind of social research.

This dismissal of the material has prompted us to examine the question of representation more closely. The dominant meaning of "representativeness" to which critics allude, or take for granted, privileges the individual, the single voice, and it is based on the assumption that people can only be seen to represent themselves. In this case, the quality of representativeness lies not in what they say, but in who they are (as defined by selected socio-economic characteristics which permit large scale generalisations about the whole population). The dominant or hegemonic notion of "representativeness" is ideologically constructed, and is powerfully influential in both popular and academic understandings of what constitutes proper methods of research into human life.

Other interpretations can and do exist. In researching a community, it is common for the social anthropologist, for example, to choose one or more "key informants" who can provide information about the community to which they belong. The informant effectively "represents" the community to the researcher. Alternatively, the community (family, social network, organisation) may elect or designate, formally or informally, a representative to speak for the rest of them. The representative may be a political delegate, but on a much more intimate scale, the representative may simply be the spokesperson or even the "writer" for that household or community (Barton & Padmore 1991:66). Gail Weinstein-Shr used the term "culture broker" to describe the individual who liaises between the immigrant Hmong community and the wider community of Philadelphia, (Weinstein-Shr, 1993:282). Finally, a representative may themself choose to step forward on behalf of a collectivity, feeling under obligation, or having a sense of responsibility, for representing (or writing down) a particular set of experiences or point of view in a public domain. It is this last interpretation which best applies to the writing done for Mass-Observation.

Recent work on definitions of autobiography has a parallel with this critique of a dominant model of representation and is equally pertinent in the task of locating the Mass-Observation writing within an appropriate theoretical framework (Sheridan

1993a). The dominant model of autobiography is based on a chronological narrative, starting at birth and finishing at the moment when the individual has reached the pinnacle of public success, or just after that point, perhaps in early retirement. It assumes a developed sense of individuality, one which is consistent with western bourgeois individualism. The model is predicted on a moment of reflection, "the autobiographical pact" (Lejeune 1986:19), "a conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life" (Gusdorf 1956/80:29). Autobiography in this model is not presumed to develop in cultures where the individual "does not feel himself to exist outside of others ..." (Gusdorf 1956/80:29). "The autobiographical form presupposes a developed individuality, a self-conscious "I" being able to grasp itself as the organiser of its own life history and as distinct from the social world" (Kohli 1981:64). Other versions of autobiographical expression (diaries, letters, notebooks and albums, collective/community histories and life stories) are, by definition, excluded.

Judith Okely has characterised this as "the Great White Man" tradition: "the lone achiever [who] has felt compelled to construct and represent his uniqueness, seemingly in defiance of historical conditions, but actually in tune with the dominant power structures which have rewarded him" (Okely 1992:7). Susan Stanford Friedman emphasises the cultural specificity of life writing, arguing that "... the self, self-creation self-consciousness are profoundly different for women, minorities and many non-Western peoples" (Stanford Friedman 1988:34). Benstock argues for the importance of identifying the including/excluding ideological power of the dominant genre: "Writing that works the borders of definitional boundaries bears witness both to the repressive inscription under the law of genre, and to the freedom and dispossession of existence outside that law" (Benstock 1988:2). Echoes on the same themes can be found in the writings of Carolyn Steedman (1992) and Liz Stanley (1992). Projects using different forms of autobiographical expression have been used effectively to represent the shared life experiences of people who have been "hidden from history". The introduction to an anthology of life stories of black women in Britain argues: "If we are to gain anything from our history and from our lives in this country ... we must take stock of our experiences, assess our responses - and learn from them. This will be done by listening to the voices of the mothers, sisters, grandmothers and aunts who establish our presence here. And by listening to our own voices" (Bryan et al 1985:2).

A model of autobiography which places the author outside his or her social context and which foregrounds the singularity of experiences is inappropriate to the kinds of writings done for the Mass-Observation Archive. Many of the correspondents explicitly speak of writing for others, on behalf of a particular group or segment of society, and in doing so, seek to represent a multiplicity of voices. One woman says of her writing:

I try not only to put ... my own views down. I ask friends at work, I ask my husband, my family, how about your views on this , and then try and write all the views down so that they've got a sort of wider version really than just my views. [F1373].

When I start writing, I thought, I can write the truth and the reason why we think the way we do. On the whole we are not jealous or envious of posher people but we think a lot of them are fools. Well, this is the reason I started writing. Not so much for myself as for all my family and relations who have always been in the same boat ... I have always thought we are a great crowd and have always been proud to be working class. [W632].

They speak for, or represent, variously, the working class, the lesbian or gay community, women as mothers and housewives, "people like me", "ordinary people", people of a certain generation or age, people of a certain locality, people of a certain political persuasion, identified by for example, voting allegiance, or newspaper readership. Identification with these collectivities may be simultaneous, or may shift over time and in relation to the substantive theme of the writing. The "we" may represent a whole class or the people in the same street. The most clearly articulated collectivity is "ordinary people", "ordinary" being understood in its most affirmative sense, (see Raymond Williams' discussion of "ordinary" and its positive connotation of "grassroots" in Keywords, 1983:225-6): sensible, regular, decent people in opposition to the intellectual and political elite.

The Mass-Observation correspondents seek to balance their personal sense of singularity, and a desire to set down for posterity something of themselves, while at the same time, they are aware, (and this is reinforced by the claims of the Archive) that the status of their personal testimony is enhanced by its position within a collective endeavour to record contemporary life in Britain. One woman said, in an interview about her Mass-Observation writing:

Some [Mass-Observation requests] *call on your unique experience and I think they are more interesting, the ones that call on your history - the uniqueness of your experience ... and although you might feel it's unique as your first kiss - everybody else experiences it so it's not - I don't mean that it's unique to you personally but it draws on your history, your family, feelings, your emotions ...* [W632].

The singular, personal, experience is therefore validated and rendered socially significant by its ability to "stand for" the experience of others sharing the same or similar historical experiences. It is at the same time singular and collective. Even when the correspondent is not explicitly representing others, we can see that there are other voices embedded within the texts, and in this respect, Bakhtin's notion of

heteroglossia, or a voice "populated by the intentions of others" provides a way of understanding these texts (Bakhtin, 1981/88:51).

Writing for the Mass-Observation is also writing for an audience (Sheridan 1993b). Participation in the project is based on, and validated by, an assumption of readership. But within that broad notion of "audience", a variety of different "inscribed" or imagined readers can be identified.[1]

For many of the correspondents, some of whom argue that they have no reader in mind when they write, versions of the self constitute the imagined reader. That self may be the audience at the time of writing, or at some future date (many keep copies for future reference), for "people like them", interested in writing, in history, in ordinary people's lives, or version of self re-cast as descendants, granddaughters and great-granddaughters.

I suppose I write for someone like myself - I try to write in a way I would find interesting, engrossing, thought-provoking, and where appropriate, amusing. [S1745]

...Ordinary people ... some like myself perhaps [S1012]

Other write consciously for the Archive, and construct images in varying degrees of detail of archivist, professor, student, researcher, archive, university, drawn from personal experience in education and from a repertoire of cultural representations, including television comedy shows. Often the imagined gender of the reader is significant.

She seems to me female. [S2519]
I assume all researchers are female and are sympathetic because I write things to Mass-Observation that I don't tell other people.
I can do it best by imagining I am talking to a woman ... an ideal woman reader. [R1671]

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[1] In practice the readers of the Mass-Observation material include, in the first place, the present author as co-ordinator of the contemporary writing project, other members of the Archive staff, students at every level from school to postgraduate students, teachers, lecturers, professors, authors of books, journalists, TV and radio researchers, community writers and publishers, women's groups, adult education groups, local historians, novelists, exhibition organisers, dramatists, novelists and poets. Occasionally some of the correspondents themselves visit to read not only their own writings but also other people's..

This sense of immediate audience may extend to include future readers, historians of the next century or beyond. And whereas some people write for other "ordinary people" like themselves (only in the future), there is also a sense in which correspondents are motivated by a desire for positive social change, and feel that by writing, they are setting down, in a public domain, a particular viewpoint which should be taken account of, and which therefore presumes that the reader has political power.

The reader? I would hope ... future researchers of social [questions], political researchers ... well, certainly from the universities but possibly from government and voluntary bodies and then government organisations will be the sort of people using it. [P2250]

Writing for the Archive is therefore a public act, although it embodies many elements which are associated with privacy (writing at home, usually alone, anonymously, about personal issues).[2]

Women frequently comment on how, when they write for Mass-Observation, they feel they have permission to dwell on their own thoughts and interests in a way that, if it was "only for themselves" as in keeping a private diary, they would feel self-indulgent. The connection with Mass-Observation, the sense in which this writing is not "just" a diary or a personal letter, but is social commentary and has a wider public function, legitimises a woman's writing, not only subjectively, but also to partner, children and other people who might make demands on her. In this respect, Mass-Observation writing is simultaneously private and public, and its appeal, especially to women, may be explained by this integration. Ultimately, the audience is potentially the widest public of all - the future. Writing for Mass-Observation is one way of writing oneself into history.

When I die I want to leave things. I don't want to just pop my clogs and they'll say, well there she goes, cheerio, goodbye. I want them to say, well, she did this writing for Mass-Observation, she knitted me a lovely bedspread, things like that, you know. I won't be able to leave any cooking behind, will I? I can't leave a cake for posterity! But you know, I'd like to think there's going to be a lot left of me really. [F1373]

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[2] This dynamic interaction between "public" and "private", which works against any dichotomous understanding of the two spheres, will be a focus for forthcoming research.

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Section 4

Literacy Practices and the Mass-Observation Project: The place of writing in people's lives

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In this section of the paper, I want to continue trying to tease out some of the issues that are arising from this research. I firstly want to say a little about our ways of working. before addressing some of the substantive issues that have emerged so far, at the half way stage in the collection of data. We meet every week David, Dorothy and I at one of our houses and discuss the themes, what kinds of questions we should be asking at interviews, waysof doing the of data analysis etc . . As an anthropologist, used to working alone on ethnographic research, I found it exciting working collaboratively and it also seems to be ideologically sound in these days of reflexivity and greater self-consciousness about the nature of qualitative work. I want to describe some of the themes that are beginning to emerge out of this process. We are very much in a raw stage and they are going to be re-worked and changed around partially in response to feedback from working papers such as this.

I also want to do two other things. I want to locate what we are doing in a broader framework of literacy theory (Street, 1984). And I want to try to make sure, like the other contributors to this paper, that we get a sense of the voices of the people we are actually talking about and working with as well.

I see this project as rooted in the Ethnography of Communication tradition (Hymes, 1974), extended by the greater attention to power and ideology evident in the New Literacy Studies (Street, 1993). This involves, firstly, considering 'literacy' as the 'social practices of reading and/or writing' rather than from a psycolinguistic or purely educational perspective and secondly recognising that literacy practices are always involved in wider social issues of ideology, identity and conflict. For M-O correspondents writing already has a special place, particularly in providing a 'voice' amidst dominant media discourses in which many of them feel disempowered. Whilst interested in what it means to write specifically for M-O, I am also looking for evidence in their responses of 'other' writing and reading and trying to make inferences about how literacy practices generally are part of people's sense of identity, place and power in contemporary society.

I would also like to clarify what we mean by the framing notion "literacy practices". I am very conscious of the way in which in educational circles, people use the phrase "literacy practice" to refer to things going on in the classroom. We are using literacy practices in a rather different and a slightly higher level of analysis, to refer to the social uses of reading and/or writing (cf Barton and Ivanic, 1982). So I want to shift

the frame from talking about literacy in the educational context to this broader social cultural context. It is very hard, living in the kind of society that we inhabit, to do that. We need to keep reminding ourselves how difficult it is against the dominant discourses through which literacy is represented. The dominant discourses tend to be either educational - which imply very often that people come from their home environments with some sort of literacy 'deficit' - or national media representations of mass illiteracy, a literacy 'crisis' and of social and intellectual decline. Trying to disentangle ourselves from those dominant discourses and talk about literacy practices as they are on the ground in real social conditions, is rather harder. What I particularly want to mean by the phrase "literacy practices" is an extension in some way of Shirley Bryce Heath's (1983) notion of 'literacy events'. That we are not just talking about activities which involve reading and writing: we are talking about the fact that in making sense of those activities we need to recognise that people doing them have brought to them conceptions, models, theories of reading and writing. And that those conceptions, models and theories are culturally grounded. People do not just do writing. They have ideas in their mind about what it means to do it. And that is rather harder to see. You can observe the external behaviour. Trying to get at the internal conceptualisation is rather harder. We are all conditioned to what appears to be natural, the common-sense naturalised views of everyday social phenomena, including those of reading and writing. The point is more obvious when looking at notions of literacy in different cultures. It becomes very apparent, when you look at different conceptions and practices of literacy, how particular the literacy practices in our own context are, how constructed and socially specific they are.

The second general point I want to make in locating this research in that broader context concerned with a cross-cultural conception of literacy practices, concerns the question of what kind of evidence is this mass observation writing for understanding the nature of the literacy practices in our own culture. Referring back to David Bloome's account earlier in this paper, it is evident that there are two senses in which the archive material is evidence for writing. Firstly, it actually is writing: the archive is full of examples, the walls are lined with boxes of people's own writing. People writing on all kinds of scraps of paper in all kinds of different ways. That has been happening in Britain over the last decade or two. So there we already have evidence of writing. But interestingly, in relation to the subject we are researching, the Archive is providing evidence of writing at another level. We have asked the respondents to answer a number of questions about the writing process itself. This, then, is evidence of another kind, of people's ideas about writing. They are, of course, ideas elicited by us, but in lots of cases it is quite clear I think from the interviews that we are also conducting that they do already have very strong notions of what the writing process is. That is the bit that I want to try to address in this piece: people's own models and theories of the literacy process.

This then gives us two meanings to David Bloome's notion of invisible writing: at one level, writing is invisible in society because a lot of this kind of everyday practice is not noticed. The dominant discourses represent illiteracy on the one hand or high

literature and culture on the other. The real everyday practices that may make up most of the writing that goes on, are invisible. But there is another sense in which writing is invisible, which is in the representations of the writing proces itself. These too are invisible. There is very little attention paid to the notion that the people who do it themselves have ideas about it. I find this quite familiar from the development literacy work, in aid and overseas development activities and literacy programmes. Often the assumption there is that people are waiting, with empty minds as it were, to be filled up with literacy, for literacy to come and make them start thinking as though they have not been for centuries already. The dominant model also assumes that, even if they do get literacy, they will simply do it as though it is a kind of behaviour. There is very little attention that I have seen in any of these mass literacy programmes to questioning and exploring people's own views of literacy. What are the models of literacy that people hold? What do they think it is that they are doing? How are they "Taking hold of literacy" rather than what the 'impact' of literacy is on people, Kulick and Stroud (1993) ask, how people take hold of it, putting people first rather than the technology. This seems to me a much more powerful concept and I am interested in looking through these data from the perspective of what are the ways these people are taking hold of it? What are their conceptions of the process?

I want to look at one or two examples of what they are thinking about it. From their own accounts there seems to be a huge amount of literacy going on. Some of it goes on in response to the archive directives but it seems as though there is a lot of it going on anyway. They belong to writing groups. They belong to reading groups. They do interesting things that I had not thought about such as they write to Companies that produce products if they think the product is not working. I mentioned this in Philadelphia at the Ethnography Forum and people said "Oh yes, we do that all the time. It is a perfectly common piece of American culture". Maybe it is. I have since then come across examples of it during interviews with writers in the UK. Nevertheless, I was surprised to find that a serious component of being literate in contemporary society seems to involve for some people entering into correspondence with Companies objecting to the way their products were coming through to them. They were also writing to Margaret Thatcher telling her how dreadful she was. They assumed the right to do this writing. Similarly, in the Lancaster project reported on by David Barton above, Harry and his friend sitting in Lancaster are writing to newspapers. There is a lot going on and, as David Bloome and others are saying, it is very often invisible.

One feature of this "a lot going on", that I find particularly interesting looking at the responses, is the kind of shadow mass-observation activity going on. People are not only responding to open-ended directives that we send them but some at least have also been doing this for themselves anyway. One woman had set herself a kind of directive well before she got involved in mass observation. It was about her family and she sent her replies about the nature of her family life and history to Radio Manchester who found this fascinating and had her talking on Radio about her response to her own directive. Somebody else wrote in, unsolicited, with an account

of a Tavistock Goose Fair which she thought we might be interested in. People are busy doing what we thought were distinctive mass-observation activity: they were doing it for themselves anyway. This raises the question - which our research cannot answer - of how much more of this is happening. If mass-observation attracts people like this, how many more people are there like this who do not know of M-O or choose to write for it, but are still doing this kind of thing by themselves?

I was also interested in where M.O. fits into the writing lives of these people more generally. One respondent talks about this explicitly: *Expressing myself in written form is necessary to me. If I didn't have M-O to do in this circumstance, I'd probably be keeping my own diary or writing a letter to a friend.* (C2295) Somebody else says she uses writing in her everyday life in response for instance, to television and newspaper items to help her think about things. *If I came across something and I wanted to think it out, probably current affairs, I'd sit there and think about it and possibly write my ideas down. To think about more in depth than I do now.* (W632) There are two interesting things to me here. Firstly, I was surprised again. I had not thought about people in their homes, watching television and writing it down to try and organise their ideas about it. Writing down notes and as Dorothy Sheridan was saying talking to the family about it. A woman I interviewed was constantly using her M.O. directive as a basis for a kind of university seminar with the family. There is an Open University quality to some of the work going on here. Some people who had missed education for one reason or another, joined the Open University as a distance learning environment to get that structure. Some it seems joined the Mass-Observation and just do it anyway. They sit with a notepad as they watch the television. They also create special space. I interviewed one woman who said *This place on the sofa is known as my writing space. When the children have friends come and the friends try to talk to me when I am sitting in that space, my children tell them "No, That is Mummy's writing space. Don't interfere 'til she is finished".* ((B1215). So during those periods when she was having children and she was afraid of getting sucked into domestity, she very explicitly says "I use this writing space to give myself an alternative person and identity".

So a lot of that is going on and that brings me to the issue of theories of literacy. As they talk about doing this kind of thing, people also talk about their underlying beliefs and conceptions of the process. The woman cited above, for instance, has a theory that writing things down helps you to organise thought. At first this might seem obvious: we might all say that is what writing is is it not? It takes a real effort of the cultural imagination to remind ourselves that this a theory. It is not necessarily true or false. I am not sure, for instance, how far I would go along with it. It seems to me that a lot of time is wasted in educational cricles on the belief that that is true and therefore, we have to get people to write in order to organise their ideas which otherwise remain unstructured in spoken mode. It is one of the bases for the misrepresentation of non-European society: that if they do not have writing, they therefore, canot organise their thoughts. Once you start looking at these theories in depth you begin to find all kinds of problems with them.

A similar theory is that about the relationship between writing and reading. A lot of people have theories about this which they tell us about or which are implicit in their writing. One again, which I had not expected, is where a writer says, at the end of a long interview in which we suddenly realised she had talked a lot about writing but hardly atall about reading: *That is why the emphasis is on writing. The writing was the reason for reading. I wanted to be able to express myself. Reading books was a way of helping me form the ideas. Yes I was thinking along those lines but now I don't need it any more. So the books served a purpose but the writing's better. I am living for today.* (W632) She is telling us there that somehow reading was a world that was distant , away from reality. It was useful to do because it would help you to learn how to write. A lot of people have that theory. A lot of parents. A lot of literature about family literacy has that theory. You learn to read then you learn to write. It is a very culturally based theory. There are all kinds of other ways in which people learn to write and other uses for reading than as a bridge to writing or an escape from 'reality'. For this woman it was such a dangerous territory of the imaginative unreal that she did not want to do reading any more. A bit later in that same interview she expressed the fear that writing might go the same way and also enter the realm of unreality: writing for mass-observation helped to keep her in the 'real' world.

These are complex theories for literacy process which seems to me we are only just uncovering and which are light years away from the dominant discourses about 'Illiterate Britain' - a headline in a national newspaper recently and a phrase that Kozol has similarly used in America to assert a 'literac y crisis' there. I hope that one effect of the research described here will be to help us get away from these demeaning stereotypes and understand just how complex people's literate lives really are.

One other theory, the relationship between literacy and orality is a key issue that people talk about a great deal. One man says: *I am much better at expressing myself on paper than orally. I think because you've got the time to think. You haven't got the pressure. You can just sort of let your mind wander.* (S2207) We have found a lot of people arguing that case. Again it is a theory. The idea that one cannot express this kind of personal identity in the oral domain so you do it in writing is again culturally specific. There are other identities that might be expressed in the oral domain that canot be done in writing and there are different conventions of writing that are more or less appropriate for particular identities, as Sheridan's anaysis of social autobiography above brings out. Again a whole series of ideas that people hold about these things.

One final example of folk theories of literacy that this links us to this broader issue of ideology with which I am particularly concerned. A lot of these people writing about the nature of writing, find themselves drawn into a dominant discourse around correctness, grammar and spelling. One respondent writes: *I had to get the spelling and the grammar right in order for people to listen or want to read what I was writing. I think if I canot spell and write correctly then people stop at that point and think there is something wrong here.* (W632) David Barton quotes similar sentiments from Harry in the Lancaster data: *"I know I can put things into sentences and start*

new paragraphs at proper places but It is the ramblings in between instead of getting down to the nitty gritty. Somebody that was educated would probably say in two sentences what it would take me to say in two pages". What interests me about this discourse is the question of why, amongst all the various discourses people could pull on to talk about the writing process and amidst all of the complex writing processes they are engaged in, do people keep calling on this'correctness of grammar' one. I think the answers are not that difficult to find in our current social environment. Certainly the government in Britain and I think in the US to some extent and the media in both places have purveyed the notion that literacy is about correctness. I think one of the reasons that the government has done so is because of the potential in educational processes for control: discipline in the class can be achieved by talking about correct spelling, correct pronunciation, correct grammar. You can use teaching literacy as a model and a way into forms of social control and discipline. Jim Gee (1991) has talked a bit about this in his recent book. How these relatively trivial surface levels of discrimination in the writing process can become markers for very deep social distinction. In this context, the ways in which the people in the archive are calling on and at the same time resisting dominant discourses seems to me all the more interesting.

I conclude with a speculation about these issues. It seems to me that a lot of people want to express themselves in writing. A lot of them missed education first time round for various reasons and have missed the social opportunities for writing: they do not find themselves in the social context in which they might have done it. A lot of the people who are writing for the archive give us that sense of beginning to discover new social niches in which writing is possible. And they begin to develop their own writing and to do a lot of varied and exciting things with it. But they are having the kind of problem that Caroline Steadman talks about in Landscape for a Good Woman in which she says as a very articulate Sussex graduate: "When I came to try and write about my own life, I found that the dominant discourses particularly in some early feminist discourses, psycho-analitic accounts and social history, did not enable me to express the truth and the feeling and the experience of my own social life. And I had to try to construct new discourses". I think that is some of what we are beginning to see in the data described here. The discourses that are available to people to write about their lives and to present themselves, appear incongruent with their own real experience. So people are constructing and experimenting with new forms of writing and developing new forms of identity with it. That seems to me one of the more exciting discoveries of this research.

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